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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 000579

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FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT FROM AMBASSADOR BEYRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/25/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [EUN](#) [LY](#) [IZ](#) [BG](#)  
SUBJECT: YOUR MEETING MAY 4 WITH BULGARIAN PRESIDENT  
PURVANOV

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle, reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Bulgarian President Georgi Purvanov, whom you will meet May 4 in Vilnius, Lithuania, has played a key role in ensuring the continuity of this country's pro-U.S. foreign policy through three administrations in Sofia. By any measure -- percentage of GDP spent on deployments abroad, number of soldiers serving in combat missions, or military personnel and civilians killed in Iraq -- Bulgaria is making a substantial contribution to international security relative to its size and resources. Now we can also add the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) that Secretary Rice will sign in Sofia April 28, which gives the U.S. access to two air bases and an army training area as part of the brigade-sized Eastern European Task Force. The long-awaited agreement is a milestone in our relations with this consistently reliable ally. President Purvanov's support for the agreement has been essential.

¶2. (C) Bulgaria is in Iraq and Afghanistan largely because it shares our interest in stability there, but Purvanov-- who faces reelection in the fall-- wants to be able to show voters that Bulgaria benefits from its strong support for the U.S. It is important that he hear from you that Bulgaria is a valued and equal partner, not just in the security sphere, but across the entire spectrum of our relationship. President Bush said as much when he met Purvanov in the White House in October 2005, and the picture now, after the basing agreement and new Iraq deployment, looks even better.

¶3. (C) The DCA negotiations have been the subject of widespread -- and more often than not, inaccurate -- coverage in the local news media. Many Bulgarians oppose the idea of "foreign bases" on their soil, fear the United States will use Bulgaria as a launching pad to attack Iran, or believe that the U.S. presence will make Bulgaria a target for terrorists. Polls show that the more people learn about the proposed U.S. presence, the less they oppose it, but Bulgarian officials -- including Purvanov -- need to do more to explain the agreement to the public.

¶4. (C) The DCA comes on the heels of a government decision to send troops back to Iraq (after campaigning last year on a platform of immediate withdrawal), and coincides with the ramping up of its presence in Afghanistan, where Bulgaria will soon take over security for Kabul airport. Consequently, the government is seeking to shift some of the focus of public discussion away from the military aspects of our relationship and toward the political and economic. Here too, we have a good story to tell. Huge U.S. investments are

in the pipeline, including a 1.4 billion dollar clean-coal power plant built by AES and a Hewlett-Packard call-service center that will create some 1000 knowledge-based jobs. We still lag behind our EU partners in terms of direct foreign investment, but Purvanov should hear that we will not be satisfied until our investment and trade relations match the high level of our security cooperation.

¶15. (C) The current government is understandably focused on getting into the EU on time, which means January 1, 2007. We support this goal. Brussels is sending mixed signals, in part to keep Bulgaria's feet to the fire on reform. Current thinking appears to be that Bulgaria will join the Union as scheduled, but with at least a Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) safeguard clause and continued EU monitoring in that area. The Bulgarians are concerned by rumors the EU may be designing additional monitoring mechanisms for Bulgaria even after accession that could affect the flow of structural funds. President Purvanov has just sent a plea to President Bush asking for a personal expression of support for Bulgaria's on-time EU accession. He will likely reiterate this request in his meeting with you.

¶16. (C) Bulgaria's problems with Brussels are primarily in the area of rule of law. Passivity in the face of corruption and organized crime has been the weak point not only in this government's record, but its predecessors' as well. This may be starting to change under pressure from the EU and with the appointment of a respected new Chief Prosecutor, a protege of Purvanov's. However, Purvanov should understand that there is no daylight between the U.S. and the EU on this issue: corruption and organized crime are his country's Achilles' heel.

SOFIA 00000579 002 OF 002

¶17. (C) In the longer term, we should encourage Bulgaria to wean itself from over-dependence on Russian energy. Bulgaria buys 88 percent of its gas and 73 percent of its oil from Russia, resulting as well in a huge bilateral trade deficit. This dependency is difficult to break, however, in part because Bulgaria is paying 35 percent below market prices for its gas, affording Moscow significant potential leverage. Helping Bulgaria to avoid putting all its eggs in one basket is a long-term project; moving toward market pricing is a shorter-term tactic.

¶18. (C) Purvanov will be pleased if you assure him, as the President did in October, that we are working hard to secure the release of the five nurses unjustly imprisoned in Libya since 1999 for allegedly spreading the HIV virus. The fate of the nurses touches ordinary Bulgarians in the same way the Iran hostage crisis touched ordinary Americans, and Purvanov has been personally involved in discussions with Qadhafi to obtain their release. Finally, you may want to privately encourage Bulgaria to continue to play a constructive role on the margins of the Kosovo final status talks by helping to build confidence between the two sides. On that issue, the government seems to accept that Kosovo will gain its independence, but is concerned about a possible spill-over effect, especially in neighboring Macedonia. Beyrle